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ABSTRACT

This position paper from the Research, Evaluation, and Accreditation Committee of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) presents a description of the Academic Decathlon program and offers recommendations for improving the program and ways that ACSA can assist the program. The description of the Academic Decathlon, a ten-event academic competition for high school juniors and seniors, includes history; purposes; competition events; participant selection; team composition; competitions at the school, county, state (California), and national levels; awards presented at the state level; sponsors; and coaches. The ACSA committee concludes that the program can be an effective motivator for student achievement; however, three problems need to be addressed: (1) tests need to be validated and scoring procedures need to be reviewed; (2) uniform procedures should be developed to coordinate test administration at the county level; and (3) ongoing financial support must be obtained. The committee recommends that ACSA support the concept of the Academic Decathlon and appoint a liaison with the Academic Decathlon Board of Directors to work on the problems. (DC)

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ACADEMIC DECATHLON

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BACKGROUND

The following Position Paper has been developed by the Research, Evaluation, and Accreditation Comittee.

The Academic Decathlon is a ten event academic competition designed to test the student's general knowledge in addition to verbal and written skills. It also provides incentive for the average as well as for the brilliant student to become interested in intellectual growth and a balance of scholastic achievement. It provides incentive for the average as well as for the brilliant student to become interested in intellectual activities; it thus opens the door to academic achievement and recognition for a cross-section of those students performing at or above the national norms.

Over the past years the general public has become disillusioned with public education and with the performance of students on various state and national examinations. The Academic Decathlon can achieve two main goals which would go a long way toward restoring the public faith in the process and product of public education. First of all, it would provide the opportunity for a broad spectrum of students to become involved in competing for positions in each high school's decathlon team. Secondly, it would provide the showcase where this talent would be displayed for the public to see.

HISTORY

The Academic Decathlon Program was inaugurated in 1968 by members of the Orange County (California) Academic Decathlon Association in cooperation with the Orange County Superintendent of Schools. The program was initiated in order to provide the opportunity for average and above average high school students to experience the challenges of rigorous academic competition through participation in ten activities.

PURPOSE

The Purposes of the Academic Decathlon are:

A. To encourage students to develop a greater respect for knowledge.

B. To promote wholesome inter-school competition in academic areas of study and interest.

C. To stimulate intellectual growth and achievement.

D. To encourage public interest and awareness of outstanding programs in our schools.

The COMPETITION EVENTS for the California Academic Decathlon are designed to test general knowledge plus verbal and written communication skills. The Decathlon consists of ten (10) events which form the basis of the competition day program.

A. Three Demonstrations
   1. Interview
   2. Essay
   3. Speech

B. Seven Examinations
   1. Economics
   2. Fine Arts
   3. Grammar & Literature
   4. Mathematics
   5. Science
   6. Social Science
   7. Super Quiz -- The super quiz involves school teams participating in a large audience situation

C. Students are supplied with references which cover at least 50% of the materials included on the written tests. The remainder of the written test material will rely on the students' general knowledge of the subject area.

STUDENT SELECTION

Each school participating has the responsibility of selecting students to be on their team. Grade point averages are considered as well as standardized test scores and counselor's recommendations. Only the GPA's for the fall and spring semesters of 10th and 11th grades are used. GPA is interpreted to include all grades (subjects) with the exception of physical education and religion.

STUDENT TEAM PARTICIPATION

A. Schools enter a team of six 11th and/or 12th grade students who may compete in the Decathlon in categories according to individual grade point averages as follows:

   1. Varsity - 0.00 - 2.99 GPA (2 students)
   2. Scholastic - 3.00 - 3.74 GPA (2 students)
   3. Honor - 3.75 - 4.00 GPA (2 students)

B. In addition, three (3) alternates are also selected -- one from each category.

COMPETITION

A. School Competition

   Each school develops its own competition format to determine which student will qualify to represent the school at the county decathlon competition.

B. County Competition

Initial competition is held annually at the county level in November of each year.

C. State Competition

The winning team (high school) from each participating county academic decathlon qualifies to participate in the California Academic Decathlon held in December. In 1979 the first statewide academic decathlon was held in California.

D. National Competition

The winner of the statewide California Academic Decathlon qualifies to participate in April in the National Academic Decathlon. In April of 1982, the first National Academic Decathlon was held in Los Angeles with Palo Alto High School emerging as the national champion.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

A. California Academic Decathlon

Gold, silver, and bronze medals are awarded to individual students in each category. Certificates of participation are also given to each student. The state champion qualifies for the National Decathlon in April.

SPONSORS

A. The primary source of income to support the activities (awards, trips, banquets, etc.) of the Decathlon is derived from donations by local corporations, foundation, industries, etc.

B. Some additional support may come from participating school districts or counties.

COACHES

Coaches (teachers) may either donate their time or, where possible, districts will pay a stipend for their service -- similar to that which is paid athletic coahces.

STUDY

This committee has reviewed a study of the 1982-83 Orange County Academic Decathlon tests, conducted by the Sacramento County Office of Education. We concur that two of the major issues which must be addressed are: 1) The technical issue of test validation (field testing of test items and in formating the tests), and 2) the Decathlon's conversion of each test to 1,000 points which has resulted in many ties having to be broken. As an example of the first concern, in a three year study conducted by Region III of ACSA, it was discovered that 25 to 50 percent of the given questions did not perform well. They were either too easy, 70% or more students got them right or too hard, less than 30% got them right. It is believed that the quality of test construction could be improved by a group of test specialists.

Furthermore, this committee has been made aware that, at the county level, the decathlon is administered on different days. While this may not have a significant impact upon test validation we believe that a procedure similar to that used by the Advanced Placement testing program be adopted, whereby everyone is taking the test on the same day and date. This would provide for more organization and uniformity, on a county-wide basis, throughout the entire state.

CONCLUSION

The Academic Decathlon can be an effective motivator for student achievement and for the improvement of public opinion of education.

As a result of this committee's study and investigation of the Academic Decathlon, we have identified three technical concerns that must be addressed before ACSA should give full endorsement:

1. A comprehensive study must be undertaken by competent test specialists to validate the tests (construction and format) and to review the present scoring procedures used for each of the tests.

2. The development of uniform procedures to coordinate the administration of the tests at the county level.

3. A procedure must be developed to obtain on-going financial support for the county, state, and possibly national decathlon competitions.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that ACSA:

A. Support the concept of the Academic Decathlon,

B. appoint a liaison between ACSA and the Academic Decathlon Board of Directors, who would support:

   1) a comprehensive study to validate the test instruments and standardize the scoring procedures presently used for each of the tests,

   2) the development of uniform procedures throughout the state for administering the tests at the county level of competition,

   3) a procedure for obtaining on-going financial support for the county, state, and possibly, national decathlon competitions.

   When these three identified major problems have been solved, then we would recommend that ACSA fully endorse and support the Academic Decathlon.

RESEARCH, EVALUATION, AND ACCREDITATION
COMMITTEE

May 1983

TO: ACSA Representative Assembly

The Research, Evaluation, and Accreditation Committee has completed a number of studies this year. Documents representing the finished products of each of the subcommittees, as listed with their chairpersons, are included for your duplication and use. The subcommittee reports contained herein have been reviewed, edited, and approved by the full state committee.

Evaluation: Bob Coombs

"Microcomputer Selection Guidelines for Administrators"
"Microcomputer Network System"
"The Bilingual Education Improvement and Reform Act--
A Follow-Up"

Accreditation: Monroe Lair

"How to Get the Most from a WASC Accreditation
Investment"
"Procedures for WASC Commission Member Nomination"

Testing: Earl Owens

"State Testing: California Assessment Program"
"A Misuse of California Assessment Program Results:
Administrator Evaluation"
"Principal's Checklist on Interpretation of
California Assessment Program (CAP) Test Results"

Research: Joe Mrskos

"ACSA Endorsement of Research Studies"
"Academic Decathlon"
"An Evaluation by California School Districts
of the Third Annual Administration of the
California Basic Data System (CBEDS)"

The committee has also accomplished additional activities such as meetings with State Department of Education personnel, assistance in research, developing region committees, WASC commission nominations, and review of evaluation issues and pertinent legislation. Through the subcommittee structure, committee members have been most productive in their contributions to the association.

Caroline DeOlden, Chairperson
ACSA State Committee
Research, Evaluation, and Accreditation